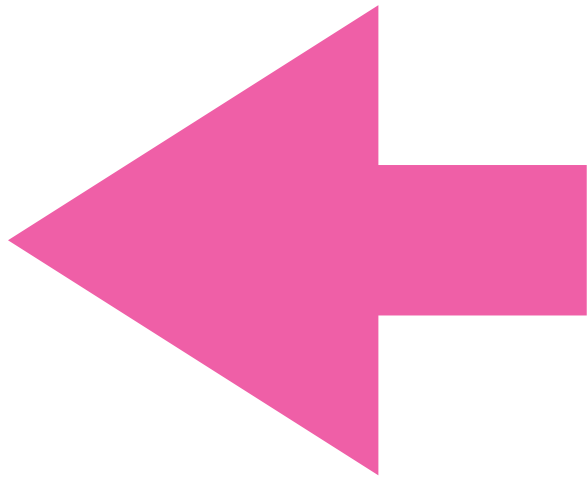
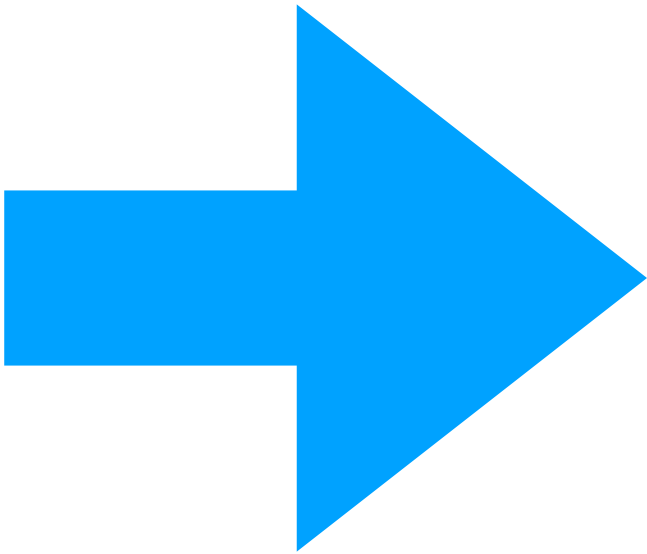


The MITEY Guide for Careers Advisers



MITEY

**MEN IN THE
EARLY YEARS**

Introduction

MITEY (Men In The Early Years) is a network/campaign created and led by the Fatherhood Institute. Our aim is to create a more gender-diverse early years workforce in the UK (and beyond). Our members include male early years practitioners; supportive female colleagues; owners and managers of nurseries and other early years organisations - and other people with an interest in gender equality and early child development.

We want more men working in early years education, part of a well-rewarded, highly trained, mixed-gender early years workforce that confidently provides the best quality, gender-sensitive education and care to young children.

The **MITEY Charter** sets out a series of statements clarifying settings' commitment to working towards a mixed-gender early years workforce. You'll find instructions on how to sign up, and a list of nurseries and other early years organisations (and the individuals within them) who have done so, on our website¹.

Although our main audiences are early years organisations (the employers) and men (the employees), we recognise and wish to support others in a position of influence over who works in early years education. That's where you, the careers advisers, come in. We hope you will find this guide useful! Please join the MITEY network and consider signing up to the MITEY Charter - and do feel free to get in touch....we'd love to hear more from you about your own ideas, activities and challenges.

Dr Jeremy Davies, MITEY Project Lead.

Citation for this report

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¹ <https://mityuk.org/sign-up-to-the-mity-charter/>

Why should we promote early years careers to men and boys?

For many years there have been UK, Europe-wide and global initiatives aimed at encouraging more girls and women into male-dominated STEM careers - some more successful than others.

Much less attention has been paid to the equally important goal of encouraging more boys and men into traditionally 'feminine' occupations, including early childcare and education. The MITEY network/campaign wants to change that. Why? For three reasons:

1. GENDER EQUALITY

Because society can never achieve gender equality while looking-after-children remains a female-only or female-led activity/job

One of the key goals of the Fatherhood Institute, which runs MITEY, is to "prepare boys and girls for a future shared role in caring for children". For us, the job of educating and caring for our children is not 'women's work': it is men's too. We believe our publicly funded services should reflect that, so that means schools and nurseries showing children (and their parents) from the earliest point possible that men and women are equally capable of, and responsible for, looking after and teaching them. One way to do this is to create a gender-diverse workforce, and to give the men and women who work in it the skills, resources and confidence they need to 'model' diversity and support girls and boys (our future women and men) learn and develop their ideas and aspirations free of gender stereotypes.

2. DIVERSITY

Because boys and men, like girls and women, are diverse - and if we want each individual to fulfil their potential, we should alert them to as wide a range of career options as possible

Boys and men are not all the same, just like girls and women are not. Rather than boxing people in by narrowing their choices based on gendered assumptions, we should be offering them careers advice that acknowledges their innate capacities and responds to the diversity of their personal interests and preferences.

3. ECONOMICS

Because it makes economic sense to draw on the whole community, rather than half of it, when recruiting

From an economic point of view, the UK needs most parents to go out to work. Which means we need access to high quality, affordable early years education, provided by sufficient numbers of staff. This is not easy to achieve in a sector plagued by low pay and status, and high turnover rates. It becomes even more difficult if only half the population consider or apply for this kind of work. So widening the net of early years recruitment to also include boys and men is a pragmatic decision, as well as an idealistic one.

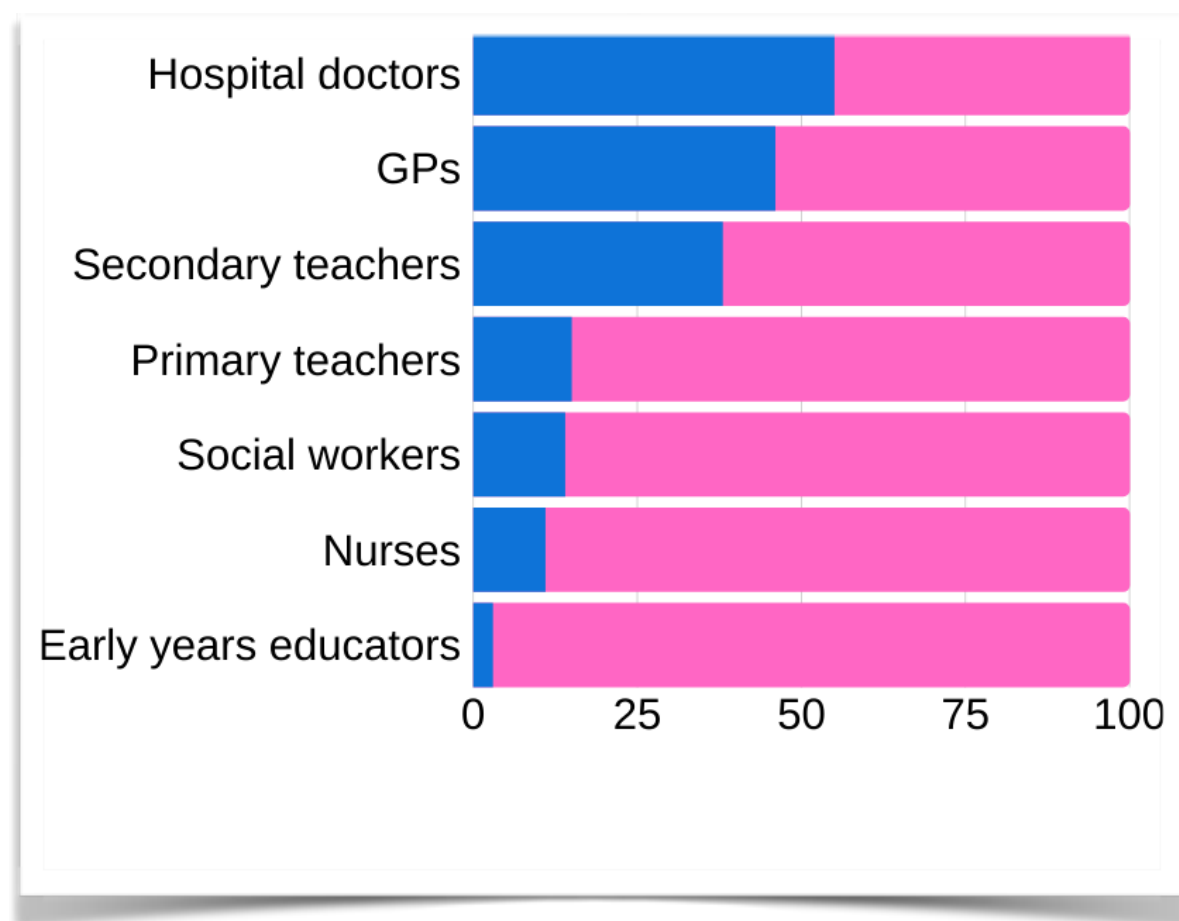
What's the current state of affairs?

Almost universally, across the world and in many different cultures, early years education is the least gender-diverse of all workforces. Latest figures show that in England & Wales only 3% of staff working in early years education are male; in Scotland it's 4%.

We know this is a global problem, and we know that countries that invest in more coordinated gender equality policies are doing better: the proportion of male early years educators is more like 10% in Norway, for example.

The UK figures have barely improved over the last 20 years, and while the lack of gender diversity is not unique to early years education, it's extreme – men make up 15% of the primary school workforce, 14% of social workers and 11% of nurses, for example.

In the graph below, the blue bars represent the percentage of workers who are male, and the pink, female. You can see that early years education is the least gender-diverse of all the caring workforces – less even than adult social care².



² For references to the data used in this chart, please visit <https://miteyuk.org/why-we-do-it/>.

What turns boys away from early years careers?

Gender stereotypes have a huge impact on people's career choices, and careers advisers can play a major role in limiting their effects³. Evidence suggests that from a very young age, children's career aspirations are shaped by what they see and hear around them. Psychological theories such as 'gender schema theory' and 'social role theory' hold that children decide 'who does what' by looking directly at the men and women in their own families, in the public sphere (including, for example, the nurseries, preschools and childminders who help look after and educate them) and in the surrounding culture.

In the UK, despite decades of equalities legislation and progress towards gender equality, most children still grow up in households where their mother does the lion's share of unpaid caring. Lots of children these days have mothers who do paid work outside the home, but to allow this to happen, families send their children to nurseries, pre-schools or childminders: a workforce that is almost exclusively female.

And the wider culture that surrounds children is both maternalist (for more on this see the Fatherhood Institute's *Cash or Carry* report⁴), and gender-polarising; the smallest of gender differences are emphasised and essentialised at every opportunity. Toys and clothes are marketed as 'male' or 'female'; boys and girls receive very different messages about their skills and capacities, and what 'success' for people of their gender looks like⁵.



Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that girls and boys come up with very different ideas when they think about possible future careers. By the age of seven, girls are nine times more likely than boys to say they'd like to be a teacher (see *Drawing the Future*, on page 6).

To get a sense of the all-encompassing nature of the 'blue and pink tsunamis' that surround girls and boys from birth, through childhood and into adulthood,

check out Professor Gina Rippon's debunking of the myth of female and male brains, in her critically acclaimed bestseller, *The Gendered Brain*⁶.

³ See Reed in Partnership's 2019 report, *Shifting Stereotypes*, available online at <https://www.reedinpartnership.co.uk/admin/resources/shifting-stereotypes-gender-and-job-roles.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Cash-and-carry-Full-Report-PDF.pdf>

⁵ For more on this theme, check out Let Toys Be Toys at <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/>.

⁶ See a BBC summary here <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190930-the-sexist-myths-about-gender-stereotypes-that-wont-die>. Or buy the book via the MITEY website (if you do, we receive a tiny commission to help us stay alive!): <https://miteyuk.org/useful-links/>.

Drawing the Future

Drawing the Future, the biggest survey of its kind ever conducted, asked primary school children aged 7 to 11, to draw a picture of the job they want to do when they grew up.

A collaboration between the charity Education and Employers, Times Educational Supplement, UCL Institute of Education (IOE), the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Education and Skills (OECD), the survey received more than 20,000 entries from children in the UK and overseas.

A key finding from the survey was that **gender stereotyping exists from the age of 7**. Across the sample, children's aspirations appeared to be shaped by gender-specific ideas about certain jobs. Boys overwhelmingly aspired to take on roles in **traditionally male dominated sectors and professions**.

Gendered patterns also emerged in STEM-related professions. Over four times the number of boys wanted to become **engineers** (civil, mechanical, electrical) compared to girls. Moreover, nearly double the number of boys vs girls wanted to become **scientists**. However, strikingly, two and half times the number of girls wanted to become **doctors** compared to boys, and nearly four times the number of girls vs boys wanted to become **vets** (a finding that fits with the notion that girls are encouraged into jobs involving 'helping' rather than 'fixing things').

Conceptions of traditional femininity, specifically ideas around 'nurturing' or 'caring' roles, may also explain the difference in the number of girls wanting to become a **teacher** or doctor compared to boys. In the *Drawing the Future* sample, nearly nine times the number of girls wanted to become teachers compared to boys. It may also be influenced by the teachers the children see, with the majority of primary school teachers being female.

Chambers, N., Kashefpakdel, E., Rehill, J. and Percy, C. (2018). Drawing the Future. London: Education and Employers.

How can we challenge the stereotypes?

So what can we do to turn the tide? Evidence about 'what works' long term in countering gender stereotyping is relatively poor, for two reasons: first, little effort is taken to challenge them, and second, when it is, what is tested tends to be brief, one-off interventions, not coordinated, multi-faceted strategies, studied longitudinally.

But there is a growing consensus that trying new approaches is important...and that the more we share best practice, and news about promising results, the more likely we are to chip away successfully at the stereotypes that can so easily hold children back from making the choices that work best for them as individuals.

At nursery and primary schools

Evidence suggests that on a very small scale, actively challenging stereotypes with young children can have a dramatic and speedy impact. For example, You Be You's 2019 pilot of stereotype-busting lessons and assemblies for Year 1 pupils in two London primary schools achieved:

- a 29% drop in pupils believing that some jobs are just for men or just for women;
- a 38% drop in pupils thinking boys end up in more important jobs than girls do, and
- a 46% rise in pupils agreeing that it's ok for boys to like playing house or families.

How big an impact this might have in 10-15 years' time, when the pupils involved are actually making career choices, is not known. And it's certainly the case that one individual teacher or parent single-handedly planting the seed of a non-stereotypical idea in a child's head early on, may not be enough to overturn a lifetime of gender-based role conditioning.

Some schools and nurseries are, in recognition of this, taking a structured approach to fighting gender stereotypes, following programmes designed to support strategic, organisational change - other examples include Gender Action, Lifting Limits and Scotland's Gender Friendly Nursery project⁷.

For even more sustained impact, there is likely a need for parents, teachers, toy manufacturers, book publishers and the wider media, to each play a part in acknowledging and fighting Professor Rippon's 'tsunamis' on many fronts.

But for now, perhaps we can agree that it's a good idea to start somewhere, and build from there. As a careers adviser, it may feel like all this is beyond your control. But there may be ways you could help children in your local nursery or primary school see beyond the gender stereotypes. Could you offer to help the teachers find men who do 'women's jobs' and women who do 'men's jobs', for a future assembly?

At secondary school

Anyone who has spent any time in a UK secondary school will know how easy it is to believe that boys and girls come from different planets, so much more pronounced are the physical differences between them as they hit puberty.

It's also true that the older we get, the more prolonged our exposure to gender stereotypes has been, and the harder it might seem, therefore, to unpick them.

But teenagers are not all the same, even if many of them hang around in groups that dress and behave similarly - and it's important to acknowledge their diverse identities, experiences, preferences and skill sets, rather than limiting their aspirations according to traditional notions of gender-suitability.

Teachers, careers advisers and any other staff with responsibility for supporting students to make choices about and/or try out possible careers, have a big role to

⁷ For links to these projects' websites, see <https://miteyuk.org/useful-links/>

play in broadening boys' and girls' awareness and understanding of traditionally opposite-gendered careers, and of the rationale for de-gendering them.

Why not make a point of mentioning early years education as a possible career to every boy to whom you're providing information about car mechanics, plumbing and the armed services?

Girls might more quickly make the link in their heads between their interest in looking after children, and a career in early years education. But don't assume from this that boys lack interest or skills. Some boys will, in fact, have lots of lived experience of looking after young children - and men who find their way into early years jobs often say that this underpinned their choice of career.

The difference is that even boys who have grown up making a significant contribution to household caregiving by looking after younger siblings and cousins, and who might be termed very 'natural' with children, may have not seen this as a pointer to a potential career; and/or have been socialised into thinking that to do so would make them 'less of a man'. You could be the person who helps them to see things differently.

Media campaigns aimed at attracting men into other traditionally female professions, such as nursing⁸ and primary teaching⁹, tend to feature men already working in the field; their aim being to 'normalise' the idea that men can do this work.

If you follow the same principle and find a male early years practitioner, rather than a female one, to come and do a careers talk, this may inspire even more boys to broaden their thinking. The more young people can 'see themselves' in the people invited to promote careers to them, the more likely they are to consider the job in question - and this is particularly true for young people in a gendered minority.

If the male practitioner were to invite interested young people to an open day or taster session at their setting, with a very clear message that boys are not only welcome but in short supply, the impact might be greater than you expect.

If you live in an area with an active local MITEY network, it may be relatively straightforward to find a male practitioner to work with; if you're struggling to find one, we will do our best to help (for our contact details, see page x).

With adult men

As with younger males, try to find ways of involving existing male early years practitioners in spreading the message that early years can be a job for men too.

Male-only or male-inclusive open days and taster sessions - where they can meet and observe staff and children - can be a great way to bring to life, for men, the idea of an early years career.

⁸ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2019/02/young-male-nursing-applicants-surge-after-we-are-the-nhs-recruitment-campaign/>

⁹ <https://www.uea.ac.uk/education/pgce/discover-teaching/men-into-primary>

And nurseries might be able to offer more of a captive audience for your messages than they think - by making the most of the dads whose children attend the setting!

This isn't to say that fathers are necessarily better as early years educators, or more interested in such roles, than men who don't have children; some men spend lots of time with young children; others don't, some are fathers, some aren't. The ones with more experience may have a better sense of what's involved in early years work, but they may still lack confidence in their abilities, and need support to see their own potential in such a career.

Whatever their background, it's worth reflecting on the extent to which women tend to mediate men's 'doing' of caregiving; even where fathers are very hands-on, it's common for mothers to be the 'lead' parent, for example, and to think of themselves - and be thought of - as the childcare 'experts'.

So really valuing boys and men as potentially equal participants in professional childcare - which is essential if we are to step beyond the stereotypes and promote early years careers as an option for boys and men as well as girls and women - can involve quite a big leap of faith on the part of everyone around them: the careers adviser, early years training provider and employer.

What else can you do?

Check your own prejudice

It's easy to convince ourselves that gender stereotyping is other people's problem, not our own. But is that really true?

Think about your own life and career, the gendered attitudes you've grown up with, and those you might carry into your work. For a bit of fun, why not try one of Project Implicit's gender bias tests¹⁰? You might be surprised at the results.

The point here is that if you are going to convincingly argue the case that men should consider a career in early years education, you need to believe deep down that they have a rightful place in such work. That means rejecting any ideas that women are 'naturally' better at looking after children; that children somehow 'need' women more; and/or that early years education is 'just playing and wiping noses'. Instead your starting point needs to be that this is important work that requires professional knowledge and expertise; and that everyone, regardless of gender, has the capacity to care effectively.

Once you've made that leap, you should be in a much stronger position to 'sell' early years education to men and boys, and to help them see the possibilities for developing and progressing their career in this vitally important sector (one which has, in the Coronavirus crisis, been recognised as the '4th Emergency Service').

¹⁰ <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Share our resources

At MITEY we have produced a series of resources to help men considering a career in early years education - and employers keen to welcome them. All are housed on our website, at <https://miteyuk.org>, and we heartily recommend that you share these with anyone you think might find them useful. They include:

The MITEY Guide to Finding Your Place in Early Years Education

<https://miteyuk.org/finding-your-place-in-early-years-education/>

MITEY case studies

<https://miteyuk.org/case-studies-of-mitey-men/>

These include interviews with:

- Julian Sandford, 48, from Barnet, an early years educator and forest school leader.
- Russell Hagan, 46, from Southport, a newly qualified early years teacher.
- Michael Walker-Takacs, 33, from Liverpool, a nursery manager.
- Jamel Carly Campbell, 32, from London, a freelance early years consultant.
- Charlie Parker, 22, from Lincolnshire, a pre-school room supervisor.

Tales from the 3%: MITEY men talk about their careers

<https://miteyuk.org/tales-from-the-3-mitey-men-talk-about-their-careers/>

This is a recording of a 30-minute group interview with 5 male early years practitioners, which happened at the 4th national MITEY conference in London in September 2019. (Please note: the quality of this video is not very good, but if you keep the volume high the content is hopefully still useful!)

Local MITEY networks

<https://miteyuk.org/local-mitey-networks/>

If you want to recommend some wider reading, including around gender in early years education, you could recommend some of our other resources, including:

Ten Myths about Men In The Early Years...and How to Bust Them

<https://miteyuk.org/ten-mitey-myths/>

There are also some useful books and articles on our Useful Links page.

<https://miteyuk.org/useful-links/>

Get in touch

Although we run MITEY on a shoestring, we do our best to connect people via email, social media, or brief-and-to-the-point call-outs in our occasional e-newsletters. So if you have an idea you want to get off the ground, and need other people to make that happen, try us out.

Sign up to the MITEY network here:

<https://fatherhoodinstitute.us1.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=ac883ae04b551cc20a24af0af&id=4c3614c306>

Contact Jeremy Davies j.davies@fatherhoodinstitute.org or tweet us @MITEYUK.